

Georgia II
MCC Learning from
“STEM Higher Education Interim Report”, RAND Corporation
July 2020

MCC has identified the following programmatic and evaluation lessons based on the STEM Higher Education Interim Evaluation Report.

PROGRAMMATIC LESSONS

- *MCC should work to obtain a better understanding of students’ ability and willingness to pay for higher education. MCC should have a clear picture of what student expectations are for higher education, and, if a partner government is proposing something new/innovative that neither they nor MCC have undertaken in the past, make sure there is a market for it.* Both internal factors, like asking students to pay for higher education in STEM fields in a country where tuition for STEM programs was covered mostly by state scholarships, and external factors, such as the devaluation of the Georgian Lari shortly after Entry into Force, made the USD 7,500 tuition very expensive and led to low enrollment rates. In the future MCC should better understand the demand for such educational programs and perhaps adopt an incremental approach of increasing tuition over time and as Compact-funded activities ramp up.
- *Sharing potential student enrollment numbers from MCC’s initial Cost-Benefit Analysis as part of the initial Request for Proposals gave bidders the incentive to overestimate their ability to recruit and retain students.* Unless due diligence on costs and willingness to pay are highly reliable, MCC should not be prescriptive about student numbers or budget estimates and should not share details of the CBA parameters.
- *New education programs require ramp up periods for outreach and to build their image or “brand.”* MCC should plan for an initial subsidy period, with mechanisms in place (for example, marketing of success stories and job placements) that reduce the risk that the subsidy phase-out period is insufficient to generate demand at cost. In addition, MCC should have in place proper mechanisms that allows the program to improve based on feedback from students.
- *Creating a partnership between a U.S.-based university and public Georgian universities was more complicated than any of the parties anticipated.* New partnerships should be structured to be flexible to allow for adaptation by all stakeholders, with certain “non-negotiables” clearly identified from the outset, e.g. there was a push in the third year of the Compact to recruit international students that took away valuable time and human resources away from other program activities, as the Government sought to make the SDSU program in Georgia part of a Georgian “hub” to attract international students.
- *MCC should agree on site identification with partner governments prior to committing Compact resources to infrastructure rehabilitation.* The partner universities identified about 20 locations across Tbilisi for science labs and classrooms, but many were located far apart from each other and it was hard for students to travel between sites and arrive on time for class. The dispersed locations



of renovated spaces across three partner universities also made MCC's infrastructure and equipment investments less visible to the public.

EVALUATION LESSONS

- *Getting responses from comparison group students at Georgian partner universities was initially very difficult.* Survey planning should consider the lack of incentives for respondents to answer surveys when they are not benefiting from the Compact-funded program. Especially when surveying non-beneficiary groups, it is increasingly important to plan adequate time and effort for building relationships and troubleshooting problematic respondent groups.